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# Destination Integration: Third Country Nationals in the North of England

## Summary Report

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# Integration up North

Training and Development in the North of England



**Migration Yorkshire**  
*Strategic leadership, local support*



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## Background

As part of the Integration Up North project funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF), the University of Salford undertook a research project to explore the settlement experiences of Third Country Nationals who were living and working in the North of England. The following issues were explored:

- The settlement and integration experiences of Third Country Nationals and how they differ according to gender, route in, and vulnerability;
- How and in what ways particular actors - such as services, employers and communities - assist in the process of integration;
- The nature and context of social relations between new migrants and local community members; and
- What local authorities and other services can do to enhance positive experiences of settlement and integration in the future.

## Policy context

Over the last decade, the issue of immigration has remained at the forefront of UK and European policy debates. This has often been framed in terms of the challenges migration poses for host communities - whether in terms of pressure on public service provision and competition for jobs and housing - or socio-cultural differences, often termed 'cohesion' issues. An alternative discourse places the emphasis on migrants themselves - how they adjust to the society and its value systems - commonly characterised as 'integration' factors. These perspectives are not, however, mutually exclusive, and often co-exist in policy documents (see, for example, Department of Communities and Local Government, 2012). Policy towards migrants in the UK has arguably become more protectionist in approach, and largely predicated on the basis of the 'impacts' migrants have upon wider society (Spencer, 2011). Although significant attention has been placed upon EU migration, people migrating from non-EU countries (Third Country Nationals) remain a significant component of the migrant population in the UK. Despite recent pressure to reduce net migration to the UK, recent data suggests that the overall numbers of Third Country Nationals choosing to live in the UK

continues to rise (ONS, 2015). Although they constitute a large population in the UK, knowledge about Third Country Nationals is extremely limited. We know relatively little about the lives of people who come to the UK to work, or to join family members; and how and in what ways Third Country Nationals integrate into UK society. As a great deal of the responsibility for the delivery of integration within communities rests with local services and organisations, these are key knowledge gaps which need to be addressed.

## Research approach

A qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews was utilised in order to capture the integration experiences of Third Country Nationals in the UK. As the definition of who constitutes a Third Country National constitutes a wide array of individuals, it was necessary to take a pragmatic approach the selection of research participants reflects this. Drawing on some of the major 'routes in' to the UK, this research documents the findings relating to those Third Country Nationals who fit within three specific groups: (1) **Highly Skilled Migrants**; (2) **Family Joiners**; and (3) former asylum seekers who had been through the UK Home Office's Case Resolution Programme since 2007 (hereafter referred to as **Case Resolution migrants**).

A total of 52 individuals across all three groups were interviewed during the first round (September 2014 - February 2015); and a total of 34 people were interviewed a second time (February 2015 - May 2015). An additional 7 interviews were conducted with people following a photo-survey element. Table 1 below details the breakdown of the sample by their participation in the three waves of data collection:

**Table 1: Number of respondents by migrant type engaged in interviews and photo element**

Group	Interview 1	Interview 2	Photo element
HSM	13	6	4
FJ	30	21	1
CR	9	7	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>7</b>

From the 52 respondents, 41 were female and 11 were male. The countries of origin of respondents were diverse and included: Afghanistan; Argentina; Bangladesh; Cameroon; China; Guinea; India; Indonesia; Iran; Ivory Coast; Pakistan; Russia; Syria and Zimbabwe.

## Findings

Selected key findings from the research are presented below. For more detail a full and detailed report is also available.

### Belonging, home and integration

- Respondents' accounts underline the dynamics of migration which involve a combination of push and pull factors coupled with the intention to improve their quality of life. These 'routes in' shaped the settlement experiences of Third Country Nationals, their understandings and experiences of integration and their opportunities to gain access to employment, education, types of social network, and their ability to exercise mobility.
- Those migrants who were previously seeking asylum generally experienced difficulties in their country of origin, or previous home, and this acted as a 'push' factor in moving to the UK for safety and a better life. This was also the group with the least support on arrival, and arguably they had high support needs given their previous circumstances.
- Family Joiners, mainly women, who married British citizens, predominantly came from rural areas, had not had access to education, and often came from poor families. This group were able to exercise limited control over marriage and migration decision-making processes (since these were brokered by their families). In some occasions such women often found themselves restricted by extended families, and a number of respondents involved in the interviews also experienced domestic abuse.
- Highly Skilled Migrants came to the UK in more advantaged positions, 'pulled' by available educational and employment opportunities, and unsurprisingly were able to exercise the most autonomy once in the UK.
- The concept of integration had little meaning for respondents. Yet despite this ambiguity, Third Country Nationals were keen to mix with the host population and with other ethnic groups, and recognised the importance of being able to speak fluent English. All respondents talked about the UK as representing 'home' for them.

### Social relations

- The interviews revealed that social relations between Third Country Nationals and their local communities were mostly positive. Although some people maintained relationships with members of their own ethnic or national group, others chose not to prioritise such social networks. There appeared to be an active willingness to develop relationships across ethnic and national groups, with many people keen to integrate with White British community members.
- The diaspora community played key roles in the settlement experience of some Third Country Nationals, particularly upon arrival to the UK and at times of vulnerability. The family could be seen to act as both a source of social support, and equally could be a source of control and therefore potentially isolating.
- The enduring presence of 'home' and of those left behind in their countries of origin were significant factors in the lives of many Third Country Nationals, particularly Family Joiners and Case Resolution migrants, who tended to describe leaving their families in terms of loss and dislocation. This was seemingly less so for Highly Skilled Migrants who had both the financial capacity and ability to visit their country of origin, and whose migration to the UK was potentially temporary when compared to the other groups.

### Paid and unpaid work

- Third Country Nationals across all groups valued employment opportunities in the UK. Many people also benefited from undertaking unpaid work and were now seeking more stable paid positions, some in the same field.
- Highly Skilled Migrants arrived in the UK for work purposes; they researched various opportunities beforehand and intended to remain mobile depending on the availability of jobs.
- Family Joiners had more complex issues revolving around English language proficiency, childcare responsibilities, and a lack of experience and confidence that prevented them from easily securing access to paid or unpaid work.
- For Case Resolution migrants, the time spent in the asylum system created the biggest obstacle, leading to prohibition from the labour market and an inability to access Higher Education.

- Those Third Country Nationals who were in employment, mainly Highly Skilled Migrants, acknowledged that their employers regularly assisted them to integrate by helping them access key services such as housing and advice. Many Highly Skilled Migrants felt integrated into the workplace and described colleagues as friends.

### The experiences of women migrants

- The majority of female Family Joiners were found to be particularly vulnerable and prone to exploitation. All of them arrived in the UK as the spouses of British Citizens and their status as Family Joiners and their gender had a considerable impact on their experiences once in the UK. Those women were often subjected to control by their new extended families and many instances of domestic abuse were recounted.
- The needs of women Family Joiners revolved around knowing their rights and entitlements, mental health services provision, English language proficiency and life in the UK classes. Law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations played a vital role in their settlement in the UK.

### The role of support services in integration

- Families, employers and education providers were identified as important institutions for the integration of new migrants in the UK.
- Accessing adequate language training was seen as the key ingredient to allow for effective integration into the local community, and which allowed for access to the labour market. This was one of the main uses of services for both Case Resolution and Family Joiner respondents.
- Highly Skilled Migrants tended to use specialised support services the least as they cited using the internet or speaking to work colleagues if they were unsure about particular systems, processes or practices.
- For Family Joiners and Case Resolution migrants a diversity of services made up by specialist advice centres and organisations, with support workers often from a migrant background themselves, were crucial components in service provision. Such services help to build trust, and pro-actively support and signpost Third Country Nationals to key agencies that provided the foundation for long-term integration.

### Reflections and future intentions

- It is clear that migrants' initial expectations of life in the UK were shaped to a degree by family networks and depictions of the UK on television and other media.
- All Third Country Nationals hoped that the UK would offer them increased freedom and independence, and greater opportunities for employment and education: in other words, an enhanced quality of life and improved lifestyle. For many respondents, their ambitions were realised: Case Resolution migrants hoped for a place which offered safety and security, and Family Joiners were initially optimistic about their new lives with their spouses and families. Other expectations of people from across the sample centred on the benefits of being in a country with a stable infrastructure and living with, what was perceived as, an open-minded, tolerant population.
- Over time, Third Country Nationals adjusted to life in the UK and many also recalibrated their initial expectations and perceptions.
- For all, aspirations remained focused on employment, feeling settled, and being independent. All of the Third Country Nationals who participated in the study intended to stay in the UK long-term, although a small number of Case Resolution and Highly Skilled Migrants planned to return to their country of origin to live at some point in the future.

### Conclusion

The findings from this research have helped to identify how integration plays out among a mosaic of structural and individual factors. Such factors combine to provide the context within which the lives of Third Country National respondents are understood and experienced. Whilst it might be convenient to think of the integration of migrants as something to be supported solely by information and education, the picture is far more complex. How 'integrated' someone is - or feels to be - cannot be easily captured or measured without understanding the lived experiences of the people concerned. This research asserts that integration is not just about developing proficiency in the dominant host language, or being full citizens in the labour market; it is also crucially about the intimacy of relationships: how people choose to spend time together, where they mix, and the sorts of experiences they share. Integration is a continual two-way process. 'Successful integration', will depend as much on those in the receiving community as

those who have migrated. Often those who are employed in high status sectors frequently live isolated lives outside of the workplace, whereas those who are not in the labour market can enjoy the mundane and reciprocal relationships that occur in neighbourhoods. Some people need to feel 'fully' integrated whilst others are content to integrate only certain components of their lives. Factors such as wealth, power and class largely determine the routes by which people travel to the UK, and these are factors which continue to determine how people exercise their agency once here.

## Recommendations

Drawing on the findings a number of recommendations are made:

- 1 Third Country Nationals want to learn English. There is therefore a need to ensure that there are enough places available on ESOL classes, at all levels, to meet demand. There was a distinct desire for more intensive (i.e. daily) provision. Provision also needs to be sensitive to people's existing levels of education.
- 2 There is a distinct desire by Third Country Nationals, who are not already engaged in the labour market, to enter paid work. There needs to be more opportunities at a variety of levels, and across a range of settings, for people to engage in unpaid work as a route to the paid employment.
- 3 Specialist services such as community advice and supported housing play an important role in facilitating integration. As a result of their long-standing networks and trust within communities, such services should continue to be funded and their capacity built where required.
- 4 Female Family Joiners who experienced domestic violence and abuse were very positive about the interventions from the Police as well as the support services available. However, these women often reported challenges to integration as their resettlement was often within communities with large numbers of people from their own national or ethnic group. In light of this, a range of locations and strategies to rehouse Family Joiners who experience instances of abuse or other vulnerable situations should be considered to help prevent further isolation.
- 5 The experience of integration is nuanced and depends on a range of factors. For example, for Highly Skilled Migrants, a degree of integration occurs 'naturally' in the workplace; similarly the

family plays an important role for some Family Joiners. However, this does not mean that 'full' integration automatically follows in all other aspects of life. It is important therefore, to seek ways to develop appropriate services that respond to these nuances.

- 6 Since the ability of Third Country Nationals to communicate in English is variable across groups, it is important to use a variety of media networks; for example, radio and other audio resources to spread information about services, opportunities, rights, responsibilities and entitlements.
- 7 Achieving a secure settlement relies to a certain extent on being connected to a wider support network. Digital media offer opportunities for people to transcend traditional borders; however, among migrants, user-competence with digital media is variable therefore, opportunities to foster and develop digital skills should be prioritised.
- 8 Although this research focused on Third Country Nationals and their reflections on integration, it is important to acknowledge the significant role that wider society plays in integration. There is a need for further research on the views and experiences of other key players; such as neighbours, colleagues, employers, service providers and family members.
- 9 This research has shown that the majority of Third Country Nationals are positive about their integration into UK society. However, there are differences in people's ability to fully participate. It is important therefore to understand peoples' integration aspirations and to facilitate opportunities for migrants to mix with others.

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